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Review Study Multiple Chemical Sensitivity

Key Words: Multiple chemical sensitivities, MCS; Environmental Illness; Toxicant induced loss of tolerance, TILT; Chemical injury.

Abbreviations: MCS - multiple chemical sensitivities; NAS - National Academy of Sciences; CDHS - California Department of Health Services

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Outline of Section Headers

ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the findings of a two-phase study of the prevalence, symptomology, and etiology of multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS). It also explores possible triggers, the potential linkage between MCS and other disorders, and the lifestyle alterations produced by MCS.

The first phase of the study consisted of a random sampling of 1,582 individuals from the Atlanta, Georgia metropolitan area to determine the prevalence of a reported hypersensitivity to common chemicals. This phase found that 12.6% of the sample reported a hypersensitivity. Further questioning of individuals with a hypersensitivity indicated that 13.5% (1.8% of the entire sample) reported losing their job because of their hypersensitivity.

The second phase was a follow-up questioning of the respondents who initially reported the hypersensitivity. This phase found that individuals with the hypersensitivity experience a variety of symptoms and triggers. A significant percentage (27.5%) reported that their hypersensitivity was initiated by an exposure to pesticides, while an equal percentage (27.5%) attributed it to solvents. Only 1.4% had a history of prior emotional problems, but 37.7% developed these problems after the physical symptoms emerged. This suggests that MCS has a physiological and not a psychological etiology.

INTRODUCTION